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SUBJECT: COPE LEADER MOSIUOA LEKOTA MEETS WITH AMBASSADOR
BOST

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Classified By: POLITICAL COUNSELOR RAYMOND L. BROWN FOR REASONS 1.4 (B)
AND (D).

Summary

¶1. (C) Congress of the People (COPE) leader Mosiuoa Lekota discussed his party's campaign platform, the broader politics surrounding the election next year, and his party's prospects for success at a lunch with Ambassador Bost, the DCM, Polcouns, and Poloff on December 2. Lekota said his party is committed to pro-market economic policies, the rule of law, and the de-politicization of all government institutions and bodies. He was not very concerned about violence around the election and said he is open to forming coalitions with like-minded opposition parties. He indirectly characterized COPE's electoral prospects as being strong, saying that "ANC will not win in Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Northwest, or Free State." However, he also noted that funding is a challenge for the party. End Summary.

Lekota Opens Up To US Ambassador

¶2. (C) COPE leader and former ANC chairman Mosiuoa Lekota met with Ambassador Bost, the DCM, Polcouns, and Poloff for a working lunch on December 2. A confident Lekota thanked the Embassy for the opportunity to meet. The former Defense Minister and ANC party chairman was dressed in a short-sleeved, buttoned-down green shirt and cut the figure of a man far more relaxed than his demanding schedule would indicate. Lekota discussed COPE's core campaign plans and issues. First, he said the party is committed to pro-market economic policies and wants to avoid allowing South Africa to fall into deficit spending as promoted by left-leaning members of the ANC alliance. He warned that a policy of deficit spending would make the country "no different than other nations in the third world." He also reiterated his message that COPE is committed to constitutionalism and the rule of law, equality before the law, and democracy by the people. He noted that COPE wants to further institutionalize "the progress we have made during the past 15 years." Lekota said COPE wants to professionalize and de-politicize all government institutions and bodies. He worried that the unionization of civil servants and security services aligned to the trade union federation COSATU risked creating partisan

behaviors favoring the ANC by these elements. He said COPE wants to ensure the police, military, intelligence services, and civilian positions remain free from partisan intervention or favor.

13. (C) Regarding COPE's campaign plans and issues, Lekota discussed broader electoral politics and prospects. He said the ANC is "playing a game" designed to catch opposition parties unprepared by not coming out and saying that the election will be earlier than expected on March 25. He said he has heard from former ANC colleagues that the ANC leadership has decided the election will be held on that day.

He responded to a question from Ambassador Bost on election violence by noting that "he is not worried about violence." However, he did say that both the supporters of the ANC and COPE are conditioned to engage in political violence. He noted that South Africa comes from a violent apartheid past that is still a living memory for many, but that people now want to avoid such violence because of the messages they want to avoid such violence because of the messages they heard promoting national reconciliation during the 1990s. He responded to a question from the DCM on the possibility of forming coalitions with other political parties by pointing to the national convention he organized in Sandton last month and said that he made it a point to reach out to all the country's major opposition parties. He said COPE is interested in building coalitions with any party with the matching interests of promoting democracy, rule of law, and pro-market economic policies. He mentioned the United Democratic Movement and the Democratic Alliance as two parties COPE could align with in the future. He said that "COPE is our name" and he is confident that the ANC would be unable to win any legal contests against the party's use of the phrase, "Congress of the People."

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14. (C) Speaking specifically to COPE's electoral chances, Lekota believes his new organization can "win." He performed an indirect calculation of the prospects, saying the "ANC will not win in Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal, Northwest, or Free State." (Note: Lekota did not mention the electoral chances of either the ANC or COPE for Gauteng, Limpopo, or Mpumalanga, perhaps suggesting he does not think his party will perform as strongly in those provinces as in the ones he referenced. End Note) He said, "You must keep in mind that the ANC is not gaining any members but we are." He noted that there are many within the government and within the ANC's National Executive Committee who support COPE's election program and message but are afraid of speaking out for fear of losing access to government jobs. He lamented that in the dying years of apartheid, such fear was "more a product of the National Party than of the ANC." However, because of the ANC's political culture that punishes dissent, today, fear stalks the political landscape as ANC members now fear the ANC. He closed the meeting by alluding to the fact that funding is an issue for COPE and that raising the \$144,000 needed as a deposit for the venue for the manifesto conference beginning December 13 already is a concern. (Note: Poloff held a side conversation with Lekota's personal assistant, Dr. Tseliso Phomane, on the logistics for the December 13-16 manifesto conference. Phomane noted that December 13 will be for registration, December 14-15 will be devoted to committee meetings and discussions on policy, and December 16 will be a larger feedback session on decisions for the party. He noted that December 17 would be reserved for meetings among COPE's leadership. He said there is no way to register for the conference at this time, but there will be "next week." End Note.)

Comment

15. (C) Lekota provided significant insights into COPE's

campaign platform, the broader politics surrounding the election next year, and the party's prospects for success. The former Defense Minister seemed convinced that COPE's message is the right one for the majority of South Africans and he was optimistic that his party would prevail at the polls. However, the former Defense Minister's admission that funding is a concern presents a serious challenge to COPE. Also, whether or not COPE's campaign message of pro-market economic policies, commitment to the rule of law, and de-politicizing government institutions continues to attract supporters also presents a serious challenge. Failure to maintain funding and to attract new supporters -- who also vote for the party -- could limit the party's electoral prospects. In either case, the party appears willing to work with other political parties to keep the ANC from winning a two-thirds majority.

BOST